1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

There are many greetings which are adjusted to social rank, so that one can say "Hello" to a social inferior, to an equal, or to a respected superior, and receive a proper reply recognizing the same distinction. People from other areas of Nigeria and Europeans claim it is a difficult language to learn. But this is probably due to the fact that the most widespread language of Northern Nigeria is Hausa, and many outsiders find they can get along with Hausa in the cities and larger towns without having to make the effort to learn Kanuri. Certainly today most Kanuri school children know some Hausa, and facility with it is spreading throughout all of Northern Nigeria.

Distinctive Kanuri cultural features, things which are of unique Kanuri origin, are not necessarily vitally important things. But they are, if you like, diagnostic features that indicate Bornu-ness in contrast to the cultures of other closely related ethnic groups in the Sudan. Perhaps the most striking feature is the women's hair style. At its most resplendent, it resembles the form of a Trojan helmet made out of an enormous braided ponytail that begins as a crest at the front-center of the head and curves up over the head to end in a slight upward curl of the tail at the back. Today a few of the young school girls are beginning to give up this traditional Kanuri coiffure and are taking on instead the Shuwa-Arab style of a smooth top of the head with hundreds of small braids clinging tightly to the sides and back of the head, at the ends of which are either loose ringlets or a pageboy effect.

Other features which are unique to Bornu are their knives and calabash carvings. These items are also unique to each ethnic group in the region, as are tribal marks cut on the face. Thus many unique features of Kanuri traditional life are thought of locally by many peoples as differentiating criteria for separating one ethnic group from another. A Northern Nigerian going to a market in Jos, or Maiduguri, or Kano, can spot a Kanuri, Fulani, or a Hausa calabash design at a glance just as he can tell another person's ethnic group by his tribal marks, or spot a Bornu knife among a pile of others.

On the other hand, the inside of a Kanuri gentleman's household is not significantly different from the household of a man of similar rank, wealth, occupation, and education, who lives in Hausa country seven or eight hundred miles to the west of Bornu. They dress in a very similar manner, eat very similar food, and share many of the same beliefs and attitudes about what is the best way to live, make decisions, treat one's family, friends, superiors, and worship one's God. Thus although there are some clear-cut diagnostic features representative of Kanuri culture, the people share in a way of life that is practiced by millions in the Sudan, or southern savannah land border of the Sahara desert.

Gathering the Material

I first arrived in Bornu in January 1956 and stayed there until August 1957. My next contacts occurred in the summers of 1964 and again in 1965, and hopefully I shall return in the future to study specialized topics to deepen my understanding of this society as it changes and progresses in the modern world. During our first visit my wife and I spent most of our time in the small village of Magumeri about thirty-three miles northwest of the capital. This was our home base. From here we also visited other parts of the emirate, especially the larger village of

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

this food is given as charity to the older women of the group who have no husbands. Both of these acts, the giving of the food and the sending out of the kola nuts, are said to be the formal announcement of the new baby's birth as well as an invitation to attend the naming ceremony held on the eighth day after birth, that is to say on the same day one week later.

It is worth noting at this point that these precautions are well adapted to the facts of Kanuri life. Infant mortality is extremely common, varying for example between 122 and 240 per thousand in the urban areas where the hospitals have been keeping records. This is especially true of the first few hours and days after birth. One man in Magumeri had only two children alive out of nine born to him and his one wife, and five of these nine had died within the first eight days of life. Although this case is somewhat exceptional, it is not difficult to hear of comparable reports throughout the emirate. The Kanuri see many of these deaths as being the result of someone's or something's (a spirit, for instance) malevolent intentions. Charms and prayers are used and divination by religious leaders is sometimes resorted to because of the insecurity the parents feel over the survival of their newborn infant. Thus the eight-day period before the naming ceremony is a cultural buffer, a cushion that allows for the disappointment and grief associated with the highly possible death of the infant.

The Naming

Early in the morning of the eighth day the formal naming ceremony is performed. As they do for all public gatherings, men and women go separately; the women, in groups formed into single files according to rank, move past the men who are seated on the ground near the entrance to the compound. The ground millet flour and other foods received at this time as gifts allow the wife to prepare her husband's food during her confinement without engaging in a most arduous part of her work—that of grinding the millet into flour. Inside the compound the women sit in front of the mother's hut chatting gaily and coloring their teeth with tobacco flowers and a local plant used specifically for this purpose. The barber and his young assistant or apprentice arrive and cut facemarks on the new-born infant and then remove its uvula. While waiting to carry out this ritual function, the barber and his assistants cut the women's hair free of charge as a mark of the festiveness of the occasion. The women collect some money for the barber which is given to him after the baby has been successfully incised. The ceremony ends when perfume is passed among the women and all assembled dip their fingers in tiny bottles or a glass, then rub the scent over their neck and hands. Many, however, stay on talking and chatting for several hours before drifting back in small groups to their own compounds.

In front of the compound the men sit on mats. On one side of the gate sit the *mallams* (religious practitioners) reading from the Koran. On the other side of the infant's hut are the men of the household sitting in order of seniority with the most senior closest to the door. Next to them are their close friends, relatives, and the highest ranking people in attendance. The rest spread out along the north side of the compound under its front wall and everyone waits for the name to be an-

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

882 883 581 156 veloped physically had not yet married. There were many rumors and much gossip to the effect that she was no longer a virgin and that men of the town slept with her. Her father, it was said, would have a hard time arranging her first marriage. The girl herself seemed to be suffering increasingly from her inability to see herself in the role of a child awaiting marriage instead of that of a developing young matron—the role now common among her young age mates. Thus in order to take up a normal position in society, girls are supposed to have their first marriages in and around the time of puberty. Failure to do so indicates a deviant and degrading development. This is the reason why almost all Bornu men say that girls who go on in the educational system are "spoiled" and should never be allowed to stay in school beyond the traditional age of marriage. The girls in school see the matter differently; the situation remains today one of tension, with the majority against education for girls, and the schools themselves looking for students and preaching a somewhat different attitude toward a girl's adolescence than that held traditionally by the people.

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882 883 584 Another point should also be noted. Most girls have very little choice, if any, in their first marriage arrangements. If they are very drastically opposed to the union, their views are considered since parents are afraid they might behave badly as young wives. However they are traditionally supposed to respect the wishes of their parents and comply with their demands. Indeed many Kanuri, both men and women, know very little about their first marriage arrangements at all since these are almost entirely made by their parents or the head of the compound they are living in at the time. It should also be realized that many Kanuri girls marry for the first time with men sometimes as much as two, three, and even four times their own age which enhances the traditional seniority of the husband as well as taking any "romance" out of it for the girls.

88 [304] Sometime around the end of childhood and into the beginning of the teenage period young boys are circumcized. This event is fundamentally a ceremonial occasion and is thus related only in a rough general way to the actual onset of puberty for each boy. Generally speaking boys are cut in groups, although in rural areas it is not uncommon to see a family performing the ceremony for just one boy in the household. On the other hand circumcision among high-ranking people such as village heads, district heads, members of the royal family, or rich traders in the city attracts many other families who try to have their own children cut at the same time to participate in the large festivities. Usually the higher the rank of the leading families involved in a circumcision the greater the number of boys who are likely to be cut at the same time.

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881 571 The important thing is not the readiness of the boy. Rather it is the auspiciousness of the occasion in terms of the family's relationship to the rest of the community. Is there a large circumcision taking place this year? Are a large number of friends and relatives asking when little Abba Gana is going to be circumcized? Have the household members, especially the household head, attended a great many marriage or naming ceremonies? Have other community members been given gifts on these occasions? Is it not time to reap the benefit of all this participation by having a ceremony of one's own to which many people will come and bring gifts of food, clothing, and money for the family and the boy? These and similar questions are the determining factors in the timing of the circumcision ceremony, and

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883 868 571 159 305 592 [304] barber and still carries out special chores for his former master. He also claims that he gives the senior barber about fifty percent of all his present receipts. As yet he does not know how to cut face marks, remove the uvula, or perform circumcisions, and so he attends all of these ceremonies with the master barber so that he may continue his education. He hopes that by the next year he will be allowed to perform some of these more advanced operations under supervision. When he has completely finished his education, it will not be necessary to do any chores for the senior or give him any commission. Nevertheless the former apprentice should always pay his respects to his ex-master and give him gifts from time to time.

883 868 571 592 834 Other apprentices living with strangers claimed they felt more freedom in the household of the stranger and thus live away from home for their training even though they practice the same craft as their father. Many said that they would return home eventually but for the present it was pleasant to travel around seeing other parts of Bornu. This freedom refers more specifically to their sexual activity or at least to its discussion since the discipline and respect given to the compound head is the same as elsewhere. However many boys discussed sex in front of the compound head while such behavior would be impossible in their natal family households. Some boys reported that their father was dead and they had been sent off by their families to the household of relatives or friends in order to learn an occupation.

882 867 105 In summary, adolsecence sharply divides men and women. A young girl takes on her role as a married woman and it is within marriage that she completes her education for adulthood in Kanuri society. A woman may divorce later on as indeed most do, then remarry and bear children throughout. However the framework of adult life is entered into at a first marriage sometime around puberty. For the boy, on the other hand, adolescence is a socially recognized state in life entered at circumcision. This stage of life is used to complete the young man's education and equip him with the interpersonal and occupational skills that are required as an adult and a potential family head.

Maturity

885 192 The mature man is described by the Kanuri as *rashidi*. Ideally this implies that he is married, has a compound of his own and an occupation, the use of some land for farming, and a recognized position in the community as the head of a compound. It also means that he has a certain degree of independence so that if he wished he could move of his own accord to another community. To be a mature man par excellence, he should also have children and the reputation of a person who does things discreetly and diplomatically. Maturity is not simply a term applied to a period of life. It is also a value judgement describing a proper and desirable behavior of an adult man. It is not just a role but an evaluation of that role.

885 Most people seemed unable or unwilling to answer the question of age in relation to maturity, and so they fell back on marriage claiming that any married man was in fact a mature adult. However a few, notably high ranking people, did give an age and suggested that a person could not be thought of as being fully mature until he was at least thirty-five, very often forty. After this age he is not sup-

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563 at different times, or may have become assimilated to Kanuri
17 culture. A shatter-belt of small tribes, part-pagan and part-Moslem, and strongly influenced by Kanuri culture, rings Bornu Emirate. (These have been described in Chapter I.) North of Bornu are the Kanembu, closely related culturally and linguistically to the Kanuri, and with an inter-twined history that goes back to the Empire of Kanem, which preceded the Empire of Bornu.
[614] The Kanembu and the Kanuri share another set of jilis--which appear to be the remnants of patrilineal kin groups, or patrisibs.

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614 The word jili will here be used in a very restricted sense to refer to the sib. Informants with an interest in the history of Bornu and with a strong historic sense relate that the jilis were no longer functioning in the days when Shehu Laminu ruled at Kukawa. Kanuri, Kanembu and all the sub-groups of Kanuri (Kwoyam, Mobber, Manga etc.) were sub-divided into jilis with
[304] the same names cross-cutting them. A child was of the same jili as his father, and each jili had its distinctive facial scars by which its members could immediately be identified. The jili was not endogamous. Each jili had its common ancestor, whose name is known for every jili; each jili had as its head
[65] someone appointed by the Mai, or king. The primary function of the jili head was to collect taxes (haraji) from the people of
[643] his jili. The Mais of old were of the jili Magumi, the royal
[613] sib, and of the sub-jili Sef. All individuals of the sub-jili Sef are descended from Sef Isami who is reputed to have come

175 567 554 (in this case a titled free-born man and a titled slave of the Shehu's are identical). Let us first consider the case of a slave of the Shehu. Slaves of the Shehu fall into two general categories: kabuna and sugurumma. The kabuna are the knights and commanders of army units. The general of the army, and a slave kabuna, held the title of Kaigama, one of the highest Kanuri titles. The Kaigama was one of the four greatest chimas, ruling one of the largest fiefs. He had very many slaves of his own. Under the Kaigama were the Kazellas, high military officers who also were slaves. These were the slave Kabuna, 175 titled and themselves chimas. The sugurumma were an entirely 567 different category. They were personal slaves, in charge of 644 839 the household of the Shehu. It was a common practice in raiding for slaves, to capture large numbers of young boys as slaves of [304] the Shehu. These were then castrated; penis and testicles were removed entirely. Of a group of fifty or so, aged five or six, who were subjected to castration, it was said that perhaps five or six might survive the operation. These eunuchs (adim, an Arabic term) served as personal servants of the Shehu and lived in his household. The sugurumma is literally the keeper of the key, an indication of his position of trust within the Shehu's 175 567 household. Several titles are reserved for adims. These are:

644 839 554 Yuroma - the most important of the adims, and one of the four greatest chimas. On his death his title goes to the adim presently holding the title of:

Mastrema - the second most important title held by an adim, and another of the four greatest chimas. He is succeeded by the holder of the title:

175 family. The susana has distinctive facial scars. The gawi
567 is a slave without a master. He may affiliate himself with a
554 new master if he so chooses. Lastly, there is the slave who
[304]
175 was bought as a chattel in the market-place, a common practice
567 in the days when Kukawa was the capital. The susana is part
554 of his master's household, whereas the others are not. The
592 susana of an important noble shares some of that importance by being part of the noble's household, and susana of titled nobles who were chimas served as kabuna of those nobles, and were themselves powerful individuals. The case cited above of the title Talba, granted to a slave in the household of the previous title-holder when there were no sons, indicates the position of a trusted susana in the household, and also demonstrates the nature of household unity.

567 Upon the death of a man who owns slaves, his son inherits
428 his slaves. Slaves are inherited just like other forms of
[643] property. The one exception to this is that the Shehu may take any slaves or chirs of one of his kabuna, either slave or
567 free, after that man's death. The rule governing children of slaves is that if the mother is a slave, the child is himself a slave of his mother's master. Status of the father does not enter in determining whether a child is slave or free, so that the offspring of a slave father and a free mother are
567 themselves free. A slave says "kəmanyi" (my lord) to his mas-
576 ter, though nowadays people say that "kəmanyi" is said only to
178 Allah. Under the Mais of old, all talaka said "kəmanyi" to the

567 Mai; under the reign of the Shehus only slaves say "komanyi"
576 to their masters and to the Shehu, and certain of the Shehu's
178 free-born kabuna address him in that way today.

576 A slave may be given from one master to another, and a slave may be freed at the will of his master. A man will call in witnesses to be present and note that he is giving such and
[673] such a slave his freedom. This may also be done in a will after a man's death, though he may not free all of his slaves in this fashion as this would be interpreted as seeking to disinherit one's descendants, which is forbidden by law. A man may also give a chir her freedom, and marry her as a regular wife if he so wishes.

576 The buying and selling of slaves has been prohibited in
178 this century, but the institution of slavery persists. Slaves,
[304] or rather susana, are still distinguished by their distinctive
[211] scars, and by their bare heads--a characteristic which is immediately noticeable since all free-born adult Kanuri males wear
[564] hats. The persistence of slavery, however, is clearly a function
[369] of the need to attach one's self to the household of an important man, particularly in urban situations. This has always been a characteristic of Kanuri society, and it continues to be so today. The slave is no longer forced to remain in the position of slave, but the potential relationship is frequently actuated by slave and by master, and as long as each meets the expectations of the other in satisfactory fashion, the relationship is perpetuated. Furthermore the status of the slave was never that

582 In almost half the cases of cousin marriages recorded they are first marriages for the man. On the other hand it is quite rare, female speaking, for cousin marriage to be anything but a first marriage. 582 This is due to the usual method of inception in which the girl is promised as a small child to the boy at his circumcision. 584 If the young girl is given to the boy and comes to live with him in his compound then he is more in the position of guardian to her, or adoptive father, and marriage does not result. [304] If the girl remains in her own compound, or in others, the boy may marry her. In either case he has the primary rights of marriage dispensation over her from that time on. One informant described his own experience with the girl he was just about to marry in the following terms:

582 584 304 881 When I was kaja (circumcised) the girl was given to me; she was only eighteen or nineteen months old at that time; she had been weaned about one month. When I was kaja, they gave me a spear, a watch, a ring, a sword, many robes, and a fine hat (the informant is the eldest son of a well established Village Head). Then my abagana (Fa-Yo-Bro) came and said, "Stand up". We were thirty-five kaja boys at that time, all clothed and taken care of by my father; my father has many chu'una (namesakes). (The informant means here that his father had given each of the boys a robe, he also means that some of the thirty-five boys were being totally supported by his father). My father's mother sat very close to me; she raised me as a child. She said, "Do not stand up for your abagana (Fa-Yo-Bro) unless he gives you his girl." All my family and friends came and brought many gifts. Then my abagana came and put two pounds into my pocket, and said, "Stand up", and I said to him, "No you must finish our custom." After a while he said to me, "I give my girl Palmatta to you". Then my father's mother said, "We agree with you, and she is now our girl."

Today this custom can be practised any time after the circumcision by mutual agreement of the parties involved, although traditionally it is supposed to be carried out at the circumcision.

587 567 [593] In the one case observed of a non-virgin cousin marriage the informant was a slave of very low status who had married a divorced woman who was his Mo-Bro-Da (she was not a slave). The woman was extremely

On the Friday within the eight-day period, or several days before this if the child is born on a Friday, two or three kola nuts are sent to the males of the town who are friends and relatives of the household, as well as to important persons of the immediate area. This serves as an announcement of the birth of a new member to the household, and as an invitation to the naming ceremony which takes place on the eighth day after birth.

The Naming

On the morning of the eighth day after birth the formal naming ceremony (su) takes place. As to all public gatherings, men and women come and go separately. The women, bringing food and flour, arrive in single file, senior women in front of junior in rank, and pass, eyes downcast, into the compound to the women's section. The ground millet flour allows the young wife to cook for her husband during the next few weeks without going through the arduous task of grinding millet. The women sit out in front of the hut of the mother chatting gaily and colouring their teeth, while the mother remains in her hut. The barber arrives to cut the face marks and remove the uvula of the child.

In front of the compound the men sit on either side of the entrance hut. On the left side (as you come out of the compound) a senior mallam, other mallams, and mallams-in-training, read the entire Koran by passing out several pages to each of the literates who have come for this purpose. On the right hand side of the entrance hut the men of the household sit on mats in order of seniority, with close friends or high status persons waiting patiently for the reading to finish and the name to be announced. All males usually contribute some money (two to five shillings varying up to one pound for high status visitors) as a token of friendship. The

885 582 871 of any institutional prolongation of a girl's unmarried status beyond puberty is regarded by the people as leading to the ruin of her normal development as it is conceived in the culture. (This opposition is also exacerbated by the fear of a loss of power of dispensation over the girl by her guardian when she attends school).

881 304 For young boys the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence is marked by circumcision. It is apparent from the variation in age, running anywhere from seven to twelve years for the circumcision of boys, that physiological maturation has very little to do with the timing of the ceremony for any particular boy. The boy's family, especially the head of the household (usually his father), decides the issue on the basis of family readiness to perform the ceremony. Often a large group of boys, sometimes as many as thirty or forty in large towns, are cut when a leading family performs a circumcision for one of its members.

The important thing for the Kanuri is not the readiness of any particular young boy for the ceremony in terms of either his behavioural or physiological development. The deciding factor is the auspiciousness of the occasion in terms of the family's relationships with the rest of the community. Is there a large circumcision taking place this year? Have a lot of friends and relatives been asking repeatedly when little Aba is going to be circumcised? Have the household members, especially the head, attended a great many marriages, naming ceremonies, etc., of other community members and given gifts on these occasions? Is it now time to reap the benefit of all that participation by having a ceremony of one's own, to which many people will come and many gifts of goods and money will be obtained? These

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and questions like these are the determining factors in the timing of a circumcision ceremony and they point to the major functions of the event. Certainly it marks publicly the opening of the gates on the roadway to manhood for the young boy, but, much more importantly, it validates, strengthens and dramatizes the relational network of ties that the family and the household maintain and attempt to promote in the society.

As would be expected in a stratified society there is much variation in the elaborateness of the circumcision ceremony, depending upon the rank of the family involved, the number of boys being circumcised together, and the upward mobility motivations of the family head. Generally speaking, the period of circumcision is fifteen days. In the traditional ceremonies the boys are out at a first and smaller celebration and then remain in their compounds for fifteen days, after which a large ceremony is held.

"They must eat good food and rest until their wound heals," said one informant. The consensus of opinion seems to be that it is "better" to have a group of boys circumcised together rather than singly. This may include several boys from one large extended family. More often the ceremony is initiated by a person of higher rank, such as a hamlet head, a Village Head, a District Head, or some person of noble family. People of lesser rank who have some subordinate relationship then try, or are asked, to have their own sons included. Social distances between the families concerned are, however, not exceptionally great. Thus a peasant's son might conceivably have been circumcised with a hamlet head's son or perhaps even a Village Head's son but it would be most unlikely that he would reach much higher in

881 his connections. The limitations on such social incongruities are
• 304 twofold. First of all, it would be considered undecorous in the eyes of the community and the person labelled as ro kura (literally: big life, i.e. "pushy" or overly ambitious). Secondly, the elaborateness and therefore the expenses involved increase enormously up through the status hierarchy of the society so that, unless the person has a great deal more wealth than his social position generally implies, he must of necessity carry on the ceremony only with the ranks immediately above or below himself in the social structure.

Exceptions are quite common to both group circumcision and to the two ceremonies held first on the day of the cutting and secondly fifteen days later. Impecunious peasants often prefer a single public ceremony on the day of the cutting. Informants explained that by restricting the ceremony in this fashion they were trying to control the expense.

Adolescence

882 The period after circumcision until marriage is a culturally recognized status for boys. It lasts from about the age of seven to twelve up to the period of eighteen to twenty-two years. For both males and females there is a blurred period between childhood and the next stage of life which in both cases ends roughly at puberty. However, for girls this commonly occurs after their first marriage, while for the boys it does not.

After circumcision the boy can be socially regarded as zairo (literally: attractive in a male sense). However, informants explain that he is still tada gana (a small boy) until he is capable of ejaculation, or until the growth of his pubic hair. The term tada gana is retained and applied to the adolescent to describe his immaturity or